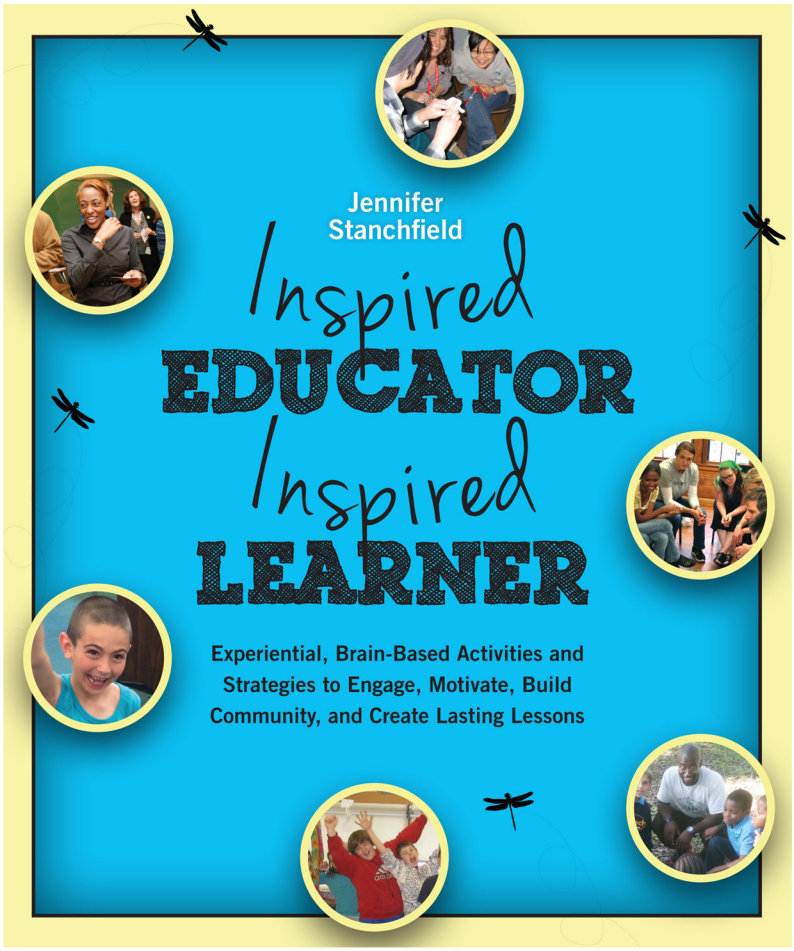
Experiential Academic or Training Content / Review Examples - Excerpt from the book *Inspired Educator, Inspired Learner*



Making the Most of Your Time

Multiple-Purpose Activities That Teach

Snapshot: The students in this 7th grade math class don't seem to be doing math at all. It looks like some strange version of dominos, until it becomes clear, as you listen to their conversation, that the dominos represent fractions. They are talking to each other about which fraction has the higher value and how to simplify their fractions as they work together to arrange themselves in order of lowest to highest value. Watching the students trying to figure it out, the teacher is learning what the students have learned from her lessons and where she needs to focus more attention. What strikes her most is that a student who rarely raises his hand in class, spends a great deal of time in the office, and hasn't handed in much homework lately is now taking the lead in helping the other students figure it out.

Integrating Community-Building, Social-Emotional Learning, and Academics

The teachers, corporate trainers, high school advisors, and other educators with which I work are constantly trying to create a balance of learning in their classes and groups. The challenge is to stretch their time to include building a strong learning community, facilitating reflection, and promoting important life skills along with the requirements of covering academic or training curriculum content.

When I first starting working as an experiential educator in the classroom, much of my work focused on building a positive and supportive school climate and promoting social-emotional learning. It naturally made sense to integrate the topics students were studying into some of the activities and reflective conversations. As schools again shifted toward standards-based testing, I found that integrating academic content with community building time became a necessity to validate the time spent during academics. The movement toward differentiation over the past decade helped me make an argument for these approaches, and I started realizing how effective some of my favorite problem-solving, community-building and communication-skills activities could be when review, reflection, formative assessment, and exploring and reinforcing academic content is the goal.

Proponents of experiential education promote the importance of active, as well as intellectual, engagement in learning along with the value of reflection. Educational neuroscientists' studies reveal that play facilitates learning and that educators can enhance outcomes by using interactive approaches and multiple senses to create multiple pathways to learning. Proponents of differentiation emphasize the need to vary or diversify our ways of delivering content and the importance of regularly checking for understanding or formative assessment. We also understand the need to practice collaboration in order to be ready for a career in the 21st century. In this chapter, we will begin to explore specific activities and techniques to facilitate this kind of learning.

This chapter of favorite tried-and-true activities will help make the most of your time by integrating academic content or training with group-building, problem-solving, and social-emotional skills development. Learners can practice, review, synthesize, and discuss academic material through playful collaborative learning. Some of the activities share a content-specific example such as math or social studies. The examples are meant to inspire your thinking about how to use this type of approach in teaching your content.

Play Dough Pictionary

Purpose/Focus: active engagement, playful learning, academic review, formative assessment, differentiation, multiple pathways to learning, vocabulary, reflection, social-emotional learning, 21st century skills, communication, collaboration, creativity/imagination, executive functions, self-regulation, competition, focus, turn taking, energizer, critical/higher order thinking

Materials: Playdough or modeling clay; paper, pencil and clipboard for the leader/facilitator

Although I first started using this activity in team-building programs, I found that it is an active, multi-sensory approach to curricular content review as well as a community and group-building activity. It is a playful approach to differentiation, and can be a fun and useful formative assessment for teachers.

Facilitation Suggestions

- Divide participants into groups of 5 to 6, using the Which One? activity on page 65.

- Have each group select a "team name" (practicing consensus/ decision-making) possibly using a topic area related to what learners are studying in class or reviewing in training. Inviting group members to choose team names within a reasonable structure is a playful way to give them a sense of ownership.
- Give each group a can of play dough.
- Have each group select a first sculptor.
- The sculptors from each team go to the leader/facilitator who gives them a word (for older groups, this can be written on paper; for younger non-readers it can be whispered).
- The sculptors then return to their teams to sculpt the object for their teammates who try to guess what it is before the other teams figure out what their own sculptor is making.
- In the group-building version, the facilitator uses random words for the sculptors, such as ice cream cone, whale, bike, etc.
- For curricular content review or formative assessment, use objects and concepts from the lesson (i.e., rock formations, tectonic plate theory, geometry, parts of a cell, geography).
- The group that guesses correctly first wins that round. I have team members raise their hands when their team guesses the word as a visual cue for me as the leader to "judge" the winners during this fast paced game; however, I don't keep score (see page 66 on healthy competition).
- Give every group an opportunity to show off their sculpture and receive appreciation from their classmates/group members.
- A new sculptor from each group is chosen, and the game continues until each player who wants to sculpt has a turn.
- This activity has choice and control built in as some participants might not choose to sculpt. Guessing is just as important. For younger groups, turn-taking is often the focus of this activity.
- I regularly have individuals switch teams throughout the game (for example every other turn I'll ask "anyone who has blue on", or "anyone with a spring birthday" to go to the team next to them clockwise). This increases the cooperative aspects of the activity and maximizes the movement and social interaction.

Outcomes/Reflections

This activity provides an opportunity for participants to get comfortable working with others in groups. It also sparks reflective conversations about creativity and its importance in solving everyday problems from math or science, to a conflict with a peer. I often use it to explore the concept that we all have creativity and can use it everyday, something that is not always acknowledged by learners.

With young children, the focus of the activity can be on executive function and social-emotional skills development such as taking turns and rules of play. With adult and adolescent groups, it can be a way to build rapport and initiate review and reflective discussions.

Encourage students to practice showing appreciation for other's work by applauding a winning team's sculpture, losing gracefully, and developing an appreciation for the process of play over winning. As with most competitive games, I never keep score and most groups don't even notice.

Practice and Review: Teresa Chirichella asked me to visit her 9th grade Earth Science class to facilitate group-building activities focused on social-emotional learning. I knew she was feeling pressure about meeting her science content goals as well, so we combined this with a curricular content review.

The group was studying rock formations. I asked for student volunteers who felt like they had a good knowledge of the rock formations they had been studying. Three boys readily volunteered to come up with the terms for their classmates and run the game. Teresa and I watched on the sidelines as they facilitated the game for their peers who were actively engaged throughout. The interesting thing was, the student volunteers were not the usual hand-raisers in class. Their teacher was pleasantly surprised at their level of knowledge. As she observed, the game became a formative assessment to gauge all of the students' readiness for the upcoming quiz.

Resources/References: I adapted this from an activity in *Quicksilver* by Rohnke and Butler who credited Ann Driscoll of the University of New Hampshire Browne Center. This variation appears in *Tips & Tools* by Stanchfield.

Charades Race

Purpose/Focus: active engagement, playful learning, academic review, formative assessment, differentiation, movement, multiple pathways to learning, vocabulary, reflection, social-emotional learning, 21st century skills, communication, collaboration, community building, creative thinking, executive functions, turn taking, self-regulation, focus, fair play, energizer, innovation

Materials: Index cards or paper and pen for facilitator, a clipboard can be helpful. Provide space for teams to spread out around the room.

Charades Race is ideal for reviewing vocabulary, theoretical concepts, characters in a book, or to reflect on events or experiences (see reflection variation on page 207).